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SUBJECT: THE "AIR WAR" -- TV AD CAMPAIGN HEATS UP AHEAD OF
ELECTIONS

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Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Political parties are funding huge amounts of television advertisements ahead of the national legislative elections in April. So far, President Yudhoyono's Partai Demokrat (PD) has placed the most ads and its air campaign has been an important factor in moving up PD's poll numbers. The populist-inclined Indonesian Party of Democratic Struggle (PDI-P) is featuring ads hitting on economic, anti-poverty themes. The small, but well-financed Gerindra party is also fielding many popular ads. The "Air War" has become a key element of campaigns in this vast country where villagers cluster around to watch the communal TV. END SUMMARY.

PRESIDENT'S PARTY ON SCREEN

[1](#)2. (C) The "Air War" on Indonesia's TV screens has begun in earnest ahead of the April national legislative elections. To date, five major parties advertise frequently on TV, but President Yudhoyono's party, PD, leads the pack with the most TV ads. PD aired more commercials last month than McDonald's or Fanta, scoring a number three spot in the top five brands.

In fact, the Indonesia Broadcasting Commission (KPI) has warned one channel that it has exceeded the air limit for PD's ads--regulations only allow parties a total of five minutes per day. (Note: PD was airing a total of 7 minutes 10 seconds of ads per day.) In addition to TV, radio and newspaper ads, PD is also creative in other forms of media outreach--it is the only party to actively use its website to publicize its campaign.

[1](#)3. (C) PD's ad strategy is to appeal to voters in the center, as a "catch all" party, and to link the party even more closely to President Yudhoyono, who is relatively popular. PD's splashy TV ads are primarily image building ads for President Yudhoyono. One shows party functionaries chanting "no" to corruption--Yudhoyono is well known for his anti-corruption stance (reftel). Another common tactic is to air heartwarming ads on holidays; two recent ads were for Chinese New Year's (funded by the Chinese Ethnic Hakka Group and Indonesian Chinese Business Council, which have endorsed the President) and Indonesian Mothers' Day (December), showing President Yudhoyono's family and his newborn granddaughter. Another ad shows average Indonesians thanking President Yudhoyono for cutting fuel prices.

[1](#)4. (C) Campaign advertising is expensive. Since strict rules govern political parties' TV ads, television stations charge the premium for their ad placements. Moreover, distribution can be spotty, since some regions only receive the national TV station or a limited number of stations. When journalists asked Andi Mallarangeng where the money is coming from for these expensive ads, he said "when you are

ahead, people are willing to bet on you." (Note: Andi's brother, political consultant Choel Mallarangeng, creates PD's slick campaign ads.) He added that PD will comply fully with regulations that require parties to declare their financial sources.

OPPOSITION HITS OUT ON THE ECONOMY

15. (C) Left of center opposition party PDI-P, led by former president Megawati Sukarnoputri, fields TV ads promising lower prices and poverty alleviation. Megawati in one ad promises to reduce the price of nine daily necessities such as rice, sugar, and cooking fuel. Other PDIP ads decry the rise in prices and what the ads assert is a lack of action by the GOI in putting in place effective public services. Keeping with these themes, Megawati publicly often takes a populist-tinged stance, saying: "a woman knows the price of chilies," implying that other candidates do not have the common touch. In a voting pool made up of 51% women, 17% of whom are single mothers and household heads, this appeal makes sense.

THE OTHER PARTIES--GERINDRA MAKES A MARK

16. (C) A new party has also made a mark. The populist Gerindra (Great Indonesia Movement) Party, led by ex-general Prabowo Subianto, is a well-financed party (allegedly from Prabowo's oil holdings and his brother who is wealthy). It maintains a strong TV ad presence. While PD currently has the most ad placements, Gerindra is not far behind and surveys show that people remember Gerindra ads as much as or more than PD's. However, people had a somewhat more positive response to PD ads than to Gerindra ads. Gerindra reportedly spends more than USD 909,000 a month on TV ads which focus on alleviating poverty, free universal education, and helping farmers (Prabowo heads the Farmers Association of Indonesia). Of the new parties, Gerindra is the most popular, polling at 3-4%.

17. (C) The Prosperous Justice Party (PKS), an Islamic-oriented party, also has launched an ad campaign. It misfired in an October ad which--in a transparent attempt to broaden PKS' voter base--portrayed former president Suharto as a "national hero" (ref B). Its latest ads are also attempts to reach out beyond its traditional voting base through plays on the acronym "PKS." One ad translates PKS as "Party of All" while showing people in a variety of national costumes; another as "Palestine we love," or as "A Party for the Ulama" (religious leaders). It is unclear how successful this will be--in a January survey of ad awareness, most respondents did not even mention PKS and the party has not been doing that well in the polls.

18. (C) The Golkar Party, which finished first in the 2004 legislative election, has been complacent about joining the TV ad war despite purported links to the ownership of several TV stations. In January, however, the Vice Director of Golkar's campaign pledged to start a massive TV ad campaign "to avoid being crushed by its opponents." Nonetheless, the ads released to date are hardly impressive; they feature Vice President Kalla asking people to "advance with Golkar" and touting rice self-sufficiency. Apparently Golkar released these ads after being angered that PD's ads gave President Yudhoyono all of the credit for key achievements. Golkar continues to lag a bit in the polls.

TV -- A KEY ELEMENT

19. (C) The 2004 electoral campaign was the first time political parties extensively used TV advertising in Indonesia. Television ad campaigns here involve positive party image building, partly because regulations prohibit negative campaigns. With thirteen free-to-air TV stations and many local and cable stations, TV has quickly become a key element of political party campaigns.

110. (C) Despite the economic slowdown and the loss of big party backers, parties spent about USD 19,500,000 on media

advertisements in the second half of 2008. Although radio, newspaper and magazine ads remain important, parties spent only USD 13,600 on radio ads last year and USD 12 million on TV ads. This is logical, since 90% of Indonesians watch TV at least once a week, while only 30-40% listen to radio and only 22% of them read newspapers once a week. It remains to be seen whether PD's ad blitz will translate into votes on Election Day or whether its current positive poll results are just a temporary surge.

HUME